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Introduction
**What Counts as Knowledge in Educational
Settings: Disciplinary Knowledge,
Assessment, and Curriculum**

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At this historical moment, knowledge itself is in transition. The digitalization of the human archive has created new objects of science and experience; it has created new sciences and reorganized the relationships between long-standing disciplines and fields of inquiry; and it has created new cultural representations and industries. Complex histories and ethnographies of knowledge production show that universities, school systems, governments, and corporations are in transition, developing new systems for the generation, systematization, surveillance, and management of knowledge. The new knowledge bases are being shaped by, and are shaping, current international debates on issues of access to knowledge as well as intellectual, artistic, and industrial property. At the center of these debates are questions about how knowledge is made, who will control these directions, and who should have access to what kind of knowledge, in all of its traditional and emergent forms, from books to websites to mass media and the arts.

In part, abetted and deterred by the new technological media and a dynamic, fluid world of the 21st century (Bauman & Vecchi, 2004), the knowledge claims of communities of learners who historically have stood at the margins of the mainstream have been placed on the table alongside, and at times in contrast to, “official” school knowledge (e.g., Nasir, Hand, & Taylor, 2008 [this volume]). This includes the knowledges and knowledge-making practices of cultural and linguistic minorities, women, and socioeconomically marginalized communities. There is recognition across this volume of the emergence and significance of alternative approaches to knowledge that merit

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consideration in the formation of curriculum. Additionally, there is a growing recognition that we are educating current students for jobs, pathways, and life worlds that are still in formation—and some that have yet to come into existence. This challenges long-standing curriculum directions that have their roots in modernist traditions where the boundaries of knowledge were assumed to be known and the skills needed for future learning and work taken as identifiable and quantifiable.

It is timely and relevant, then, that we revisit the question of what should count as knowledge and, by extension, whose knowledge counts. Our aim here is to move research and educational policy-research-practice dialogues back to foundational questions about what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts in an historical context where much of the policy debate has been preoccupied with issues of reform of institutional structure and instructional method. In many of these current debates between media and politicians, policymakers and researchers, disciplinary experts and educationists, questions about knowledge, or rather, knowledges, have been taken as given: that there is a corpus of “basic skills,” core knowledges or competencies that have self-evident educational value; or the assumption that there is a corpus of canonical disciplinary and cultural knowledge, received wisdom, that is beyond criticism and is “essential” for cultural literacy, citizenship, national identity, and so forth. These assumptions have, in turn, been translated into key criteria, standards, and benchmarks for legal-judicial, technical-scientific, and ethical-moral assessments of school efficiency in the production of educational “outcomes.” Yet what might count as an educational *outcome*, however constrained by the scientific, institutional, and political economic contexts, has been preempted in the current policy climate by a narrow focus on what is readily measurable, that is, on knowledge constructs and domains readily amenable to standardized achievement testing (Au, 2007).

This volume of *Review of Research in Education* brings together a group of international scholars who are asking questions about the nature of academic disciplines, knowledge and pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. Authors were asked to (re)examine what counts as knowledge across disciplinary areas as they reviewed their respective fields and to consider future research directions. The authors (re)examined knowledge and explored implications for learning and teaching in the arts, English, foreign languages, history, literacy, mathematics, and science. Additional chapters examine knowledge and pedagogy beyond specific disciplinary frameworks to consider teacher professional learning, assessing knowledge for English-language learners, and the sociology of the curriculum. Throughout this volume the chapters speak to issues related to learning, teaching, and critical access to residual and emergent traditions. The authors also consider the cultural, linguistic, and social class diversities of the institutional settings where knowledge and pedagogy meet. As the chapters demonstrate, these diversities pose opportunities and challenges for education.

Across the chapters, the authors document ways that specific social groups, including discipline-based groups, create specialized discourse, signs and symbols, ways of representing knowledge, and ways of thinking and inquiring that come to count as knowledge in these groups over time. They also offer cogent critiques of current

versions of what Michael Apple (1993) termed “official knowledge.” We view each of the chapters as characterizing ways that specialized knowledge was, and is, created for specific purposes and entered into educational settings through actions taken by members of various groups, disciplines, and societies. These knowledges, as demonstrated by current research and theories presented, are constructed by members through discourse and interaction and develop institutional histories through social practices as they are reinvoked and reinvented over time. Accordingly, knowledge in education is constructed, and knowledge of concepts and practices serves as a tool for learning and building capacity for problem solving, identity, and affiliation. Thus, as is argued across the chapters, learning disciplinary knowledge entails more than acquiring basic skills or bits of received knowledge. It also involves developing identity and affiliation, critical epistemic stance, and dispositions as learners participate in the discourse and actions of a collective social field. From this perspective, knowledge is not held in archives and texts, but is constructed through ways of speaking, writing, and acting. Thus, knowledge is continually tested, contested, and reconstructed through the emerging genres of academic knowledge in education.

Throughout the volume, therefore, authors argue that although there are demonstrable reasons for considering the value of thinking about knowledge through disciplinary frameworks, there needs to be full acknowledgement that the boundaries and practices of academic disciplines are fluid and negotiated. Across the ways of knowing characterized in the various chapters (e.g., the arts, science, history, languages, English), knowledge claims, evaluation of knowledge claims, and the criteria for the evaluation of knowledge claims change over time. Importantly, these changes in knowledge claims, evaluation, and criteria occur through specific actions taken by individuals and by groups through concerted activity. In this way, *what counts* as knowledge, who has access to such knowledge, and whose knowledge counts are interactionally accomplished and are potentially subject to questioning, critique, and change—depending, of course, on the rules and regularities of the institutional, political, and economic fields where knowledge is constructed. Knowledge is not held in the “official” curriculum, although such curriculum supports and constrains the possibility of access to particular types of knowledge for all students.

The responses of our various contributors cover a broad spectrum. All begin from a recognition of the historical, cultural, political, and social forces that affect the selection, shaping, transmission, and construction of knowledge in school settings. All begin from a recognition that school subjects and “school knowledge” are built and shaped according to different criteria than disciplinary traditional knowledge per se. Furthermore, many show that disciplinary knowledge beyond schooling does not map directly to the construction of school subjects (Deng & Luke, 2007)—there is no discipline of “science”; history is often taught in the U.S. context, for example, as “social studies”; art in complex and connected cultural contexts does not necessarily parallel art in school. At the same time, each field discussed here—from arts to history to English to language study to science to mathematics—is formed and shaped in relation to concomitant changes and shifts in relevant disciplinary fields. Yet across these chapters, there is a more sophisticated understanding of what counts as

discipline and the related issues of what counts as disciplinary discourses, practices, and techniques: as tied to institutional, material, and ideological interests; as contested; as situated within both microethnographic and macrosocial and cultural contexts; as having multiple perspectives; and as in an historical transition in a period of trans-disciplinary, interdisciplinary problem solving and major paradigm shifts.

The critical reviews here return us to Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) key insight that disciplines constitute complex social fields whereby "systems of objectification"—epistemological frameworks for naming and understanding the world—are themselves produced by complex political economies, institutional cultures, and relationships of power. The continually contested nature of curriculum in schooling represented in different chapters demonstrates how changes are the results of dialectic debate (Kelly, 2006). The contributors address questions about how and in what ways educational actors in particular institutional contexts are reframing knowledge and how they are defining and (re)formulating what counts as knowledge for teachers, students, teacher educators, and researchers.

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